

City of Cincinnati



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Dear Members of City Council, county officials, and to the extent appropriate, Hilltop Executives:

I am glad to learn that Hilltop will be presenting to the public on September 3rd its desire to locate its operations in Queensgate. As I have said many times, the city greatly appreciates Hilltop's longstanding commitment to Cincinnati. It is a strong business with more than a hundred employees. We value their existing presence on our riverfront and have never asked them to move from their current location.

Hilltop and the county are trying to move Hilltop to land that is owned in part by the city. To accomplish this, existing businesses have to relocate or shutdown and lots of public money will be spent to do so.

I think we all agree that the public is entitled to know all aspects of any deal to move Hilltop prior to considering any legislation that would ask the planning commission, city council and the city manager to give title to city land to Hilltop and also to accept title to other Hilltop-owned land (the "Noramco" site).

At a minimum, the public should be told at this hearing, and ideally before, the following:

1. Hilltop's full schematics and design for all locations, including, but not limited to, the 6th Street Yard, and its goal to locate some of its operations on city owned land west of the Southern Railway Bridge.
2. A description and mapping of how all truck, car, boat, and any other transportation vehicle will access the various locations and estimated truck counts, etc.
3. Any and all environmental reports for the "Noramco" site in Lower Price Hill.
4. A full, un-redacted copy of the county-Hilltop purchase contract, which includes all public expenses to be incurred in that transaction. Considering how much money the city, the county and other parties may need to spend to move forward with this transaction, I believe it is vital to the public interest and to the city's consideration of any proposed transaction to know how much money the public is spending on this purchase of Hilltop's existing site.
5. The exact location and design of the asphalt plant--there needs to be certainty on this.

In addition to the above, I ask my colleagues on City Council, some of whom are considering initiating legislation—that would violate the long-standing practice to retain City ownership of existing city riverfront property—to give away the city owned Riverfront property in exchange for the Hilltop-owned "Noramco" site in Lower Price Hill, to make sure that any such legislation protects the city's interests by ensuring the following:

1. That an appraisal of both properties be published before any transaction occurs.
2. That Hilltop or the county agree to pay for and conduct all appropriate remediation of the Noramco site so that it could be converted to a park.

3. That the city be held harmless from this proposed transaction and that any agreement will compensate the city for the many expenses it will incur and loss of revenues from the city owned land.

The following issues should be resolved in any agreement:

- a. The city would be LOSING a revenue producing asset, so the city should be paid the net present value of future rent payments.
- b. The city would be GAINING a property that would result in the removal of an existing business and therefore would not have any revenue associated with it and will require significant remediation before it could be turned into a park. Hilltop or the county should provide some transition assistance to the displaced business and should also pay for all remediation of the site.

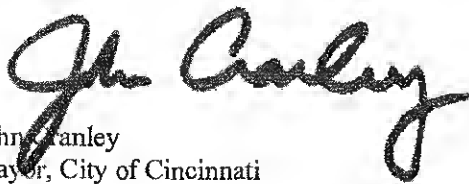
These are just a few of the very large unknowns about this transaction that the elected officials and the public are entitled to know prior to making any legislative decisions. We are being asked to do this transaction to accommodate a music venue at the Banks despite the fact that a music venue can be accommodated at the Banks on Lot 24 which does not require moving Hilltop or transforming riverfront property into a surface parking lot. To be clear, when I initially proposed the idea of a music venue (and warned that Newport could beat us to the punch if we didn't move fast), the Bengals supported putting it on lot 24 and did not condition it on moving Hilltop. It has been the county, not the Bengals, that has pushed the Bengals to allow the music venue to be located closer to Paul Brown Stadium, which requires their consent and has led to the agreement to move Hilltop. The Bengals did not initiate this chain of events.

This overall transaction involves the county granting very valuable riverfront property for the Bengals to earn money on game days and to pay Hilltop to move from its current site. The city should not be harmed financially in order that two private businesses benefit.

We are told that this deal makes the county's stadium deal better. But the public won't know if that is true until it sees the amount of public money that will be spent to move Hilltop.

The public has a right to know and the city should not commit to spend any money or transfer any land until all the facts are on the table. Sunshine makes better public policy than secrecy.

Thanks, and I look forward to your responses,


John Cranley
Mayor, City of Cincinnati